



NEWS RELEASE

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YOU SNOOZE, YOU LOSE – DON'T DRIVE DROWSY

~ *Drowsy Driving Prevention Week aims to prevent crashes and save lives* ~

CLEARWATER, Fla. – Driver fatigue leads to more than 1,500 fatalities each year in the United States. That fact is more than a statistic to Ronshay Dugans' family. It is a reality. A driver who fell asleep at the wheel of a cement truck led to the death of the eight-year-old girl two years ago in Tallahassee, Fla. To bring attention to the public safety issue at a critical time when millions of motorists are about to embark upon long weekend road trips for the Labor Day holiday, the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles and the Department of Transportation co-hosted an event today in conjunction with the hospitals of Morton Plant Mease, law enforcement representatives and safety advocates to announce Florida's *Drowsy Driving Prevention Week* on Sept. 5 – 11.

State Rep. Alan Williams, District 8, sponsored the legislation that created the *Ronshay Dugans Act* during the 2010 Legislative Session. The Act designates the first week of September as *Drowsy Driving Prevention Week*.

"Ronshay's family shares the story of their tragic loss so that others don't have to experience the same," said Representative Williams. "Drowsy driving decreases awareness, slows reaction time and impairs judgment. The catastrophic losses that can occur when drivers doze off at the wheel can be prevented, and we want drivers to plan their daily commute and long trips accordingly so that they can arrive safely at their destinations."

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that each year driver fatigue results in 100,000 police-reported crashes, 1,550 deaths, 71,000 injuries and \$12.5 billion in monetary losses. However, the full impact that sleepy drivers have is unknown because crashes caused by driver fatigue are under-reported as they often rely on a driver to self-report.

So whose eyelids are most at-risk of dropping anchor while at the wheel? According to NHTSA, drivers in the following three groups pose the highest risk of falling asleep while driving.

- Young people (ages 16 to 29), especially males.
- Shift workers whose sleep is disrupted by working at night or working long or irregular hours.
- People with untreated sleep apnea syndrome and narcolepsy.

- more -

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Regardless of a driver's vocation, age, sex, health condition or other characteristics, any driver can become overconfident and fall victim to drowsy driving. Measures that drivers can take to stay alert behind the steering wheel are:

- **Catch some Z's.** A good night's sleep goes a long way to prevent drowsy driving.
- **Bring a buddy.** By having another driver on board, you have someone to share the driving responsibilities and help keep one another alert.
- **Take a break.** Stopping to get out and stretch your legs every few hours or even to catch a quick nap will help you recharge your battery.
- **Drive sober.** Alcohol and driving never mix. Also, heed prescription medication labels and any warnings that say they may make you drowsy.

Fatigue and drowsiness can impair your ability to safely operate a motor vehicle, which not only puts you and your passengers in danger, but also it places everyone else on the road with you at-risk. Florida launches its campaign – *You Snooze, You Lose. Don't Drive Drowsy* – today to encourage drivers to take proactive steps to avoid driving drowsy. For more information about drowsy driving and the campaign, visit www.dot.state.fl.us/safety.

About Morton Plant Mease

Nationally recognized for health care excellence, Morton Plant Mease Health Care is dedicated to providing community owned health care services that set the standard for high-quality, compassionate care. Morton Plant Mease Health Care is part of the BayCare Health System comprised of the following hospitals – Morton Plant, Clearwater; Mease Dunedin, Dunedin; Mease Countryside, Safety Harbor and Morton Plant North Bay, New Port Richey.

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